

Nurse Services in Noise Control Programs

THE CALIFORNIA MEDICAL ASSOCIATION and the California Nurses' Association have joined in a statement of the propriety of the registered nurse's performing certain services in the implementation of the noise control orders for industry set up by the Division of Industrial Safety of the Department of Industrial Relations. The statement follows:

1. *Audiometric testing* may be done by a nurse who has been instructed in the use of audiometric equipment by a qualified instructor. The nurse would explain the audiometric testing as a screening procedure to the employee. The nurse would record the observations obtained from the audiometric testing equipment; she could not interpret the observations; she could not diagnose the hearing status of the employee; she could not prescribe treatment.

2. *Before ear plugs or other noise protective appliances are fitted* for an employee, an otological examination and diagnosis are necessary. Such a diagnosis can only be made by a licensed physician. The California industrial hearing conservation program was enacted to protect the employee, and the individual otological examination, evaluation and diagnosis is one step for the protection of the employee, and therefore also for the employer.

(a) An occupational health nurse may fit molded ear plugs or other protective hearing appliances if the nurse has a doctor's order for a specific employee to fit the ear plugs, or other hearing protective appliances for the employee, and the nurse knows how to fit the device.

(b) The nurse may irrigate ears as part of fitting protective hearing appliances if there is a physician's order based upon his diagnosis of the employee's condition.

3. *Records and reports*

(a) The hearing record should be a part of the total medical record; it should be properly dated and signed and should note any instructions given to the employee; and should include a notation of the issuance of protective equipment, the date and the kind of equipment issued.

(b) On the individual's medical record, the following should be recorded:

- (1) Work history.
- (2) Screening tests and nursing observations
- (3) Medical evaluation of ears and orders by the physician.

(4) Instructions to employees as to the use and the maintenance of protective equipment.

(5) Date and type of issued protective equipment, and date for follow-up visit.

(c) If an outside consultant, with perhaps a mobile unit, does the testing, a record may also be kept by the outside consultant if this is acceptable to the employer and to the employee. The occupational health nurse's records would show this acceptance of the second set of records.

4. *Testing equipment—Maintenance*

(a) Within company policy and guiding regulations the occupational health nurse can arrange a schedule for periodic calibration of the audiometric testing equipment by a qualified technician and/or the service representative of the vendor. A qualified industrial hygienist or safety engineer would be the person to investigate and evaluate the environmental conditions, including noise levels and controls.

(b) The employee should be instructed in the use of and hygienic care of the equipment issued to him by the physician or the occupational health nurse, and where indicated, by representatives of the plant safety committee. Within each agency, administrative policies concerning individual employee responsibility for the care of protective equipment should be established.

5. *Periodic examinations*

Good practice would indicate that there should be periodic examinations of the employees. The plant physician, the employer and the occupational health nurse in charge, should work together in determining the timing, the scope, and the extent and condition of periodic examinations.

6. *Visitors*

Management, in its written policies, shall determine if the exposure and need for protection of a visitor requires action. The plant physician should state what temporary noise protection is to be supplied, and by whom.

General

The occupational health nurse should work with all persons involved in health and safety (including medicine, management, labor, industrial hygiene, safety, insurance) in planning, developing and implementing the company's hearing conservation program.

COMMITTEE ON OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH
CALIFORNIA MEDICAL ASSOCIATION